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ESSAYS ON THE TRUTHS AND ERRORS OF ORTHODOXY.

ESSAY III.

Orthodox View of Total Depravity.

IN speaking of the fall of man, we necessarily anticipated somewhat the doctrine of Total Depravity. Still, we must say something further on this doctrine, because it is so important in the church system: it is, indeed, at its foundation. Those who accept, in its strictness, the doctrine of Total Depravity, cannot avoid any point of the severest Calvinism. Schleiermacher has shown, in his "Essay on Election," that this latter doctrine necessarily follows the doctrine of Total Depravity: for, if man is wholly depraved, he has no power to do any thing for his own conversion; therefore God must do it. And if some are converted, and not others, it must be because God chooses to convert some, and does not choose to convert others.

Let us look, then, at what Orthodoxy says of the *extent* of human depravity. In all the principal creeds, this is stated to be unlimited. Man's sin is total and entire. There is nothing good in him. The Westminster Confession and the Confession of the New-England Congrega-

tional churches describe him as "dead in sin, and wholly defiled in all the faculties and parts of soul and body." Other creeds use similar language.

In considering this theory, we are struck at first by the circumstance, that the Bible gives it very little support. The Bible continually speaks of man as a sinner; but there are very few texts which can, without straining, be made to *seem* to teach that he is totally depraved. Let us examine a few of them.

FIRST PROOF-TEXT.

A text often cited is Gen. vi. 5, — the reason given for destroying the human race, in the time of Noah, by the Deluge: —

"And God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually." But this seems to be a description of the state of the world at that particular time, not of its character in all ages. It is not a description of man's natural condition, but of an extremely degenerate condition. If the state of the world here described was its natural state, it would rather be a reason for not having created the race at first; or, if it was a reason for destroying it, it would, at best, seem to be as strong as one against creating it again. If a man plants a tree in his garden, whose nature he knows is to produce a certain kind of fruit, it would seem hardly a good reason for cutting it down, that it produced that kind of fruit: certainly it would not be a good reason for cutting it down, and planting another of precisely the same kind in its place. The reason why the race of men was destroyed was, that it had *degenerated*. But there were some good even then; for in the ninth verse we are told that "Noah was a just man, and perfect in his generation, and walked with God."

SECOND PROOF-TEXT.

There is another passage, in the fourteenth Psalm, which is quoted by Paul in Rom. iii.: "There is none righteous; no, not one: there is none that understandeth, none that seeketh after God. They have all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable: there is none that doeth good; no, not one. There is no fear of God before their eyes."

This passage is relied on to prove total depravity. But we may reply, that,—

1. This also is a degenerate condition, not a natural one. It was a condition into which men had fallen, not one in which they were born. "They have all *gone* out of the way, they are together *become* unprofitable." It does not, therefore, apply to men *universally*, but to men in those particular times.

2. It was not true of *all*, even at that particular time. It was not true of David himself, that he did not seek after God, or have the fear of God before his eyes; or else other passages in the same book are not true in which he says the contrary. "O God! early will I seek thee: my soul thirsteth for thee; my flesh longeth for thee," &c. He also frequently speaks of and to those who fear the Lord; and says, "I am a companion to all those that fear thee."

The "all" is not to be taken strictly. It means people generally at that time. Just so it is said, "There went out to him Jerusalem and *all* Judæa, and *all* the region round about Jordan;" which does not imply that *no one* staid at home.

"But," it may be said, "does not Paul teach this to be taken universally, when he quotes it, and adds, "Now we know that what the law saith, it saith to those under the law, that every mouth be stopped, and all the world guilty

before God"? I think he means to say, that, as this is said to Jews, it proves that *Jews* as well as Gentiles are very guilty. He is addressing the Jews, who boasted of their knowledge of the law. Chap. ii.: "Behold, thou art called a Jew," &c.

THIRD PROOF-TEXT.

Jer. xvii. 9: "The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked."

Supposing that we are to take this as an unlimited expression, and not as a strong declaration of the wickedness of the Jews, it still does not prove total depravity of the nature, but merely that of the affections of "the heart." Man's nature has other things beside desire: it has conscience, reason, and will; and it does not follow that these are also depraved.

FOURTH PROOF-TEXT.

Rom. viii. 7: "The carnal mind is enmity against God."

This does not prove that the mind of man, in his *natural* state, is enmity, but in its *carnal* state; that is, when subject to fleshly desires. Nearly the same phrase is used in the verse before; and is translated, "To be carnally minded is death."

FIFTH PROOF-TEXT.

Eph. ii. 3: "We were, by nature, children of wrath, even as others."

"Children of wrath" means exposed to God's displeasure on account of our sins. We are naturally so, out of Christ; for we have pardon by Christ.

"By nature" does not necessarily mean as human beings, or that our natural constitution makes us children of wrath. "Nature" means external position, origin, race. So (Gal. ii. 15), "Jews by nature." So, too (Rom. ii. 27), "Uncircumcision, which is by nature."

The same word is used twice in James iii. 7, and is translated *kind*. "Every *kind* of beasts, birds, serpents, things in sea, is tamed of man-*kind:*" literally, "whole animal *race* is tamed by the human *race*."

If φυσις here meant "constitutional depravity," the same word in Rom. ii. 14 must mean *constitutional goodness*, where we are told that some "do *by nature* the things contained in the law." So, too, we read of the "olive-tree," wild by nature, in Rom. xi. 24, 21.

"By nature," here, plainly means the original condition, not the original constitution. Just so, we call wild animals, in a state of nature; and savages, the children of nature.

These five texts are the strongest in the Bible to support the doctrine of Total Depravity; and, as such, are constantly quoted. They have very little weight, and none are from the words of Jesus.

On the other hand, there are many passages which seem to declare that there is something good in man, in his unconverted or natural state; and that, even in that state, he may turn toward the light, and struggle against evil.

John iii. 20, 21: "Every one that doeth truth cometh to the light."

Matt. xxvi. 41: . . . "The spirit is willing; the flesh is weak."

Rom. ii. 24: "Gentiles, who have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, and show the work of that law which is written in the heart."

Acts x. 35: "In every nation, he that feareth God, and worketh righteousness, is accepted of him."

But the passage most strikingly and thoroughly opposed to the doctrine of Total Depravity, is the description, in the seventh chapter of Romans, of the conflict between the law in the members and the law of the mind. Paul, speaking evidently from his own experience in his unconverted state,

describes this conflict. He teaches that man is not totally depraved; but that, even in the carnal man, there is a good principle, only that it is conquered by the evil. "I delight," he says, "in the law of God, after the inward man." "With the mind, I serve the law of God." "His will," he says, "is to do that which is good." If the mind delights in the law of God, and the will to do right is present with us, we evidently are not *totally* depraved; but the total depravity, if anywhere, is in the flesh only, as Paul plainly says: "I know that in me (that is, in *my flesh*) dwelleth no good thing;" that is, the depravity is physical, not moral. But physical depravity is not guilt, but only disease.

Nevertheless, there is a sense in which man may be said to be often totally sinful; but this is only in a total alienation of the will from God. It is not a total depravity, but a total alienation. Total depravity, therefore, is not natural, nor natural depravity total. Total depravity is the depraved or rather perverted choice, which chooses darkness instead of light, evil instead of good.

Let us see what there is of this in man.

The gospel of Christ, as I understand it, undertakes to effect an entire change, a radical reformation, in human character. It proposes to reform the life by changing the heart; by giving new aims, new affections, new aspirations, new objects of love and pursuit. Jesus does not endeavor to alter and improve, a little here and a little there, on the outside of the character, — to improve a little our modes of action in this and the other particular; but he alters the conduct and character by altering the fundamental ideas, by inspiring an inward life. This wonderful crisis, which takes place in the profoundest depth of our nature, under the influence of the gospel; this great event of life, which forms the turning-point of our being and history, — is called

in the New Testament "the new birth," "regeneration," "to be born again," "conversion," "a new creation," "to be born of God," "to be baptized with the Holy Ghost and with fire," "to put off the old man," "to have Christ formed within us." It is a very superficial view which explains away the meaning of all these profound expressions, and supposes that they only signify a little outward improvement and reformation. We need just such a change as is here described, — a radical one, not a superficial one. All need it. Those who are the most pure in heart, and most blameless in character (spotless children, as they seem to us, of a heavenly world), feel their own need of this change no less than do the profligate and openly vicious. Parents and friends say, "We have no fault to find with them." They do not say they have no fault to find with themselves. They feel they have all kinds of fault to find with themselves, and nothing is so painful to them as this commendation. They say, "Outwardly we may seem innocent; but we feel an inward want, that weighs on our heart like a frost."

"This is a true saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners." It is because we are sinners that we need to experience this great change. I do not wish to exaggerate the amount of human sinfulness. Theologians have carried their attacks on human nature quite too far; and the result has often been, that men have looked on sin as a sort of theological matter, which had nothing to do with actual life. They have cheerfully admitted that they were totally depraved by nature, and could not think or will a good thing; and then have thought no worse of themselves than before. We know that there is something good in men, something which God loves; some pure aspiration, even in the natural heart; some throbs of generosity, some warn-

ings of conscience, some pure love, some courageous virtue, in the humblest, the most depraved, the most abandoned. There are some flowers of sweetest perfume which spring up on the uncultivated soil of the natural heart, on which God and his angels smile; for the seeds of those flowers God himself planted. We have seen harebells, graceful and lovely as the sweetest greenhouse plant, growing out of a sand-heap; and we have seen some disinterested, generous benevolence in the mind of a hardened profligate. It is not, therefore, because there is nothing good in man that he needs a change of heart, but because he is destitute of a deep-rooted and living goodness till this change has taken place.

Look at the *actual sins* of men. The majority of men, in a civilized community like ours, do not commit great crimes, or fall into flagrant vices; because they have little to attract them to such a course, and much to deter them from it. They are aiming at those objects which they need the countenance, aid, and good opinion of their fellow-men to obtain: to be glaringly vicious would make it impossible. Also there is a certain amount of conscience, which restrains them; the influence of good education and good habits, which preserves a certain uprightness, and purity of character. But is it a deep principle? If so, why do the vast majority of men allow themselves in many small violations of the same laws which they would not break on a large scale? They would not steal; yet they commit, every day, some slight acts not perfectly honest: they take advantage of others in little things. They would not lie; yet they exaggerate, and conceal part of the truth, and color their statements to produce an effect. They would not kill; but they are willing to injure one who has interfered with their interests. With these tendencies and feelings, why would they not, under different influences,

commit greater crimes? How often do we feel, in talking with the criminal and abandoned, that, in their circumstances and with their temptations, we might have been as bad as they!

Does not all this show that there is a deep and hidden fountain of evil within our heart, which is restrained by external influences, by checks and barriers with which God has kindly surrounded us? and, if these were taken away, it would break out into something far worse than now appears. How much there is of evil under the smooth surface of refined society! How many thoughts of sin pass to and fro in the heart, while the countenance seems pure and calm! Who ever looked into the interior depths of our most moral community, and saw all the secret sins and pollutions which are hidden there? Every now and then, there occurs in the midst of the most refined classes some startling revelation of long-concealed wickedness, which makes men look each other in the face, and draw a long breath, as though they should say, "Which of us will next fall?" So in the midst of a fruitful country, of lakes and valleys and vine-clad hills, the earth will sometimes open, and a river of melted lava pour forth, desolating all around. We hear of this with wonder, and do not think that right beneath our own feet, a few miles down, under these smooth fields and gentle plains, that same fiery ocean is rolling its red billows. God has laid his hand upon our heart, and restrains its lawless passions as he restrains the tornadoes and earthquakes and volcanic fires, else they might easily hurry us to swift destruction.

Still, if this were all, no radical change might be necessary. It might be enough, that, by effort and self-discipline and direction of the thoughts, we gradually overcome our evil habits and tendencies; but when we resolve to do so, and make the effort, we meet with an unexpected

resistance. "The spirit is willing; but the flesh is weak." "I find a law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin in my members." The Church has long asserted the doctrine of an hereditary depravity; and we have seen that there is more truth in it than we have sometimes supposed. It is not total; but it is real. Besides the sins of our own committing, there are the sins which our ancestors have committed, which have made themselves part of our bone and flesh. We are not exactly balanced in our natural state: there is a preponderating tendency toward evil in one or another direction. This forms too fearful an alliance with circumstances, the moment they become powerful to draw us away from good. A friend of mine, some years since, was making a trip up the Lakes, late in the season. As they entered Lake Huron from the River St. Clair in the noble steamer, the skies were serene, and she ploughed her way on toward the north; so that, by night, the land had sunk almost out of sight. But then the wind began to freshen, the sea rose; and as the night advanced, and the wind blew harder and harder, the boat strained, and staggered along, occasionally struck hard by a heavier sea, till at last one of her wheels was carried away, and the fires were put out by the water. How long and anxious was that night! How many prayed then who never prayed before! When morning came, the boat was found to be drifting before the wind and waves, directly upon a rocky shore on the south-east side of the lake. There was no help in man: but a gracious Providence, all at once, caused the storm to lull, so that a fire could be built; and, with one wheel, the boat got into a harbor. Man seems a powerful being, when he is surrounded by favorable circumstances, and is going with wind and fair weather; but let the wind change, and his weakness becomes apparent. He who just now breasted the tide is now drifting helplessly before it.

But there is a difficulty far worse than any I have mentioned. We might conquer the sin which most easily besets us, we might conquer our inherent evil tendencies and outgrow them, if we really wished to do so; but the deepest of all evils is a want of love for God and for goodness. We know that we ought to love and obey God; but our heart is alienated from him. The great mass of men are living away from God. They are not conscious of his presence, though they know that he is near to them. Though they know that his eye is upon them, it does not restrain them from sin. Though they know that their heavenly Father and best Friend is close at hand, how seldom do they pray! how seldom look up with gratitude for all their mercies and joys! This shows a terrible estrangement of soul from God. The veil is on their *hearts*, not on their minds.

I once heard a discussion on the somewhat abstract question, "whether sin is a positive or merely a negative evil?" Now, whatever may be the case with other kinds of sin, this alienation of the heart seems to me a very positive evil; for it is an antagonism, and resistance of goodness. If the supreme goodness of God does not attract us, does not excite our affection, does not irresistibly draw us to him, then it repels us; it makes the thought of his presence a restraint and burden; it makes us wish to go away from God. The goodness of God is so very positive a thing, that we cannot be indifferent to it; we cannot be neutral in regard to it. If we do not love it, it is disagreeable, and we are uncomfortable in the thought of it. Swedenborg relates that certain wicked persons were allowed to enter heaven on a certain occasion: but they immediately became almost lifeless, and, from the torment and pain in their head and body, prostrated themselves on the ground, and writhed like worms; but, being taken and carried into hell, became

comparatively comfortable. What can be more terrible than the idea thus conveyed of our aversion to goodness, which makes heaven intolerable, and the presence of God insufferable torture! Can any thing express, more than this, the need of a change of heart?

Jesus, I think, asserts a similar view when he says, "He that is not with me is against me." "No man can serve two masters: for he will either love the first, and hate the last; or love the last, and hate the first." He will not be indifferent to either, if their characters and commands are of an opposite kind.

I do not mean to say that we *hate* God; but I mean that there is something within us, while our hearts are not wholly his, which makes it unpleasant and burdensome to think of God and pray to him. We feel a certain repugnance to a familiar and happy intercourse with our heavenly Father. Our prayers, if we pray, are formal and cold; our hearts are hard, and their affections do not flow easily upwards.

Now, if there be such a thing as a change of heart, which will make it a pleasure to pray, a joy to think of God; which will make it natural to us to approach him, and dwell on the thought of his goodness; which will enable us to see him in the majesty and sweetness of nature, in the rise of empires, and the death of an infant, in the coming of Christ, and in every good thought which swells in our souls, — then it is evident that this is what we need. Let us dig deep, and build our house upon a rock.

There is such a change of heart as I have described. Jesus came to save sinners by taking away the heart of stone, and giving a heart of flesh. He saw the whole depth and extent of the disease which he came to cure. There are some preachers who do not see how great an evil sin is, and would not know what to do for a penitent and anx-